

February 6, 2023

Committee on Children

Testimony of Rabbi Ari Weisenfeld, Director of the Connecticut Office of Agudath Israel of America, in support of SB 929 AN ACT EXPANDING SCHOOL MEAL PROGRAMS TO PROVIDE FREE SCHOOL MEALS TO ALL STUDENTS

Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, and members of the Committee on Children,
My name is Ari Weisenfeld and I serve as the Director of the Connecticut Office of Agudath Israel of America.

Agudath Israel is a national organization that advocates on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community.

I want to express my support for SB 929.

We have a thriving and growing community spread out over multiple cities in Connecticut. Our Yeshiva day schools accept children from low income families with little or even no ability to pay tuition. Many of our schools have even qualified for the EANS federal covid relief program, which requires participating schools to have at least a forty percent or higher student poverty rate. Most of our schools have well over half of their students receiving financial aid.

Our Yeshiva day schools are all nonprofits striving to serve their community to the best of their ability. However, because of the increased cost of kosher food, if our schools are only able to provide lunches to the students that qualify for reimbursement under the Federal School Lunch Program, it is simply not cost effective for them to participate in the program.

Even the families that are not income eligible for the federal program are still struggling financially, and need all the help they can get. Should this bill pass and all students made eligible for the School Lunch Program, our schools would be able to participate and with the economics of scale that would allow us to offer all of our children nutritious kosher meals daily.

If I can be of any assistance, I am available at your convenience.

All the best,

Ari Weisenfeld

Director Connecticut Office

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